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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001025

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, S/CT, SA/PD; NSC FOR
E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06-12-13

TAGS: PGOV PTER KPAO CE JA NO LTTE

SUBJECT: Tigers stick to hard-line stance, essentially rejecting Tokyo's call to re-engage GSL right away

Refs: (A) Ops Center/Colombo 06-12-13 telecon

- (B) Colombo-SA/INS 06/11/03 unclass e-mail
- (C) Colombo 1018, and previous
- (D) Tokyo 3772, and previous (Notal)

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills.

Reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Reacting with haste to the Tokyo donors conference, the Tamil Tigers restated their view that the GSL must take quick steps to form an interim structure in the north/east. The Tigers also underscored that they did not accept the understandings reached at Tokyo. In spite of the stark message, the government has little choice but to keep plugging away as it tries to break the deadlock. Suggested press guidance is contained in Para 9. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) TIGER STATEMENT: Not wasting much time, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization has reacted to the Tokyo donors conference. (Note: Please see Refs C-D for reporting on the Tokyo conference, which was held June 9-10.) As is the group's recent custom, the LTTE response -- which was relatively terse by Tiger standards -- was posted on the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet." (Note: The statement was issued late June 11 local time and was passed to SA/INS in Ref B. We are not certain whether the "TamilNet" text contained all of the statement, but it seemed to encapsulate the main points. Also, while most LTTE statements are issued in the name of its London-based spokesman Anton Balasingham, this one was characterized as an "official" message from the group's "headquarters" in northern Sri Lanka.)

3. (SBU) In the statement, the LTTE stuck to its recent hard-line stance, essentially demanding that the GSL take quick steps to give the group interim control of the north/east. (Note: Since late April when the LTTE left the peace talks and said it would not participate at Tokyo, the group has been harping on the issue of forming an interim structure in the north/east -- see Ref C.) Denigrating the remarks made on the topic by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at Tokyo, the LTTE stated:

"We are disappointed to note that the prime minister's statement does not offer anything new...The prime minister has not responded to our call for a draft framework for an innovative and effective political-administrative structure. Contrary to Mr. Wickremesinghe's statement to the international donor community, we seriously differ in perception in connection with what the LTTE leadership proposes and what his government offers. While our leadership has proposed an interim administrative framework, a political-administrative structure for the northeast with wider participation of the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government has offered a council with a structure and mechanism for the development of the region."

4. (SBU) Regarding Tokyo, the LTTE made clear that it resented the government's interactions with the donors, stating:

"The compulsions that arose from severe economic and political bankruptcy have compelled the government to seek the ultimate refuge in the so-called 'international safety net' to resolve the economic and political crisis of the country. By seeking this 'safety net' the Colombo regime has shifted the peace process from third party facilitation to the realm of international arbitration by formidable external forces that has far-reaching consequences for the political and economic destiny of the island."

5. (SBU) Finally, noting that it was not present at Tokyo (though not mentioning that this was its own choice), the statement underlined that the Tigers did

not feel bound by understandings reached there, stating:

"The LTTE was not involved in the deliberations or in the formulation of these declarations. We have not been consulted on the set of propositions and resolutions enunciated in the Tokyo Declaration. The Colombo government, with the active assistance of the facilitator and its international 'tactical allies' has formulated this strategic paper to superimpose its own agenda on the LTTE. This is unacceptable to us."

16. (C) GSL REVIEWING STATEMENT: As of late June 12 (local), the government has not yet responded to this latest LTTE message. Ambassador Nanda Godage, a director at the GSL's Peace Secretariat, told us that the government was carefully reviewing the message, but had not yet decided how to respond. He said he thought any response would take at least several days in coming, as the GSL discussed the matter with the Norwegian government facilitators and Japanese government representatives. (Note: Per Refs B-C, there has been some talk of Japanese representatives trying to meet with the LTTE soon in order to brief the group on Tokyo among other items. It is not clear, however, whether these plans have been finalized.)

17. (C) OTHER REACTION: No one that Mission has touched base with was particularly surprised by the substance of the LTTE's June 11 statement. The general feeling was that the group was simply restating its positions. In discussions with contacts, two items that did stand out were the following:

-- Speed of the response: Ambassador Godage told us that he was a bit surprised by how quickly the LTTE reacted to Tokyo. He said he had originally thought it would take the group at least several days to mull things over and get its reaction out. Instead, the group took all of one day to send out a response. Godage said he wondered whether the group, embarrassed by the success of the Tokyo meeting, had decided to react quickly and viscerally in re-emphasizing its hard-line position.

-- Blunt tone: Other contacts flagged what they saw as the very blunt tone of the LTTE's statement. Roman Catholic Bishop for Jaffna Thomas Savundranayagam told us that he thought the tone of the statement was quite telling and indicated just how serious the group was on the issue of an interim administration.

18. (C) COMMENT: In spite of the LTTE's stark message, the government has little choice but to keep plugging away as it tries to break the deadlock. The LTTE's statement, unfortunately, gave the government very, very little to work with. Despite calls at Tokyo for the group to re-engage in the peace talks, for example, the group gave zero indication that it planned to do this soon. All in all, the latest statement serves to highlight how difficult it is to deal with the LTTE, especially in light of the group's truculent mood. END COMMENT.

19. (SBU) SUGGESTED PRESS GUIDANCE: We recommend that Department not comment on the LTTE's statement, allowing the Sri Lankan government to have the spotlight. If Department does make a comment, however, we would suggest something along the following lines:

Begin text:

We regard the Tigers' reaction as precipitate. The international community at the Tokyo conference unanimously agreed that the Tigers should be invited to take part in the development of Sri Lanka's north and east. The Tigers should accept this invitation. The details of a provisional arrangement in the north and east should be worked out at the negotiating table.

End text.

10. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS